Slips of Evidence for James Earl Ray?

But ex-FBI agent's story questioned

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A former FBI agent who says he impounded James Earl Ray's car after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. reported yesterday he had found in the car two slips of paper that may support Ray's claim of a conspiracy. But a Memphis prosecutor in charge of the Ray case said FBI files on the car's seizure did not even mention the former agent's name.

Former agent Donald Wilson said he kept the slips of paper — bearing figures and words that included the name "Raul" — and did not turn them in to his FBI superiors because he did not trust them. Ray has claimed since soon after the 1968 assassination that a mystery figure named "Raul" made him a patsy and actually killed King. But in the three decades since the assassination neither Ray nor anyone else has offered evidence that "Raul" even exists.

After the Memphis assassination, Ray drove his white Mustang to Atlanta, where he had rented a room, and abandoned it in a housing project lot. The FBI soon found the car, seized it and lifted Ray's fingerprints from it.

Wilson claimed in an interview published yesterday in the Atlanta-Journal Constitution that it was he who impounded the car. But John Campbell, the Memphis prosecutor in charge of the Ray case, said: "We have the FBI reports on the seizure of the car, and they never even mention a Donald Wilson. The only time we see a Donald Wilson mentioned is a brief reference in connection with the investigation of some money orders."

Wilson did not explain why he waited 30 years to come forward. He met in Atlanta with Ray's lawyer William Pepper, and they showed the local district attorney, Paul Howard, copies of the slips of paper. Wilson said he wanted to deliver his supposed evidence to U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno.

One of the papers was a list of names, locations and figures that seemed to be dollar amounts, the Atlanta newspaper said. At the bottom was the figure 450,000, with a date and an unclear word that seemed to say "Raul." There also was a telephone number and the name "Raul."

Another phone number listed, next to a letter "J," matched the Dallas number of Jack Ruby — who had killed Lee Harvey Oswald in 1963. But why Ray would have possessed that number in 1968 — five years after Ruby was jailed and a year after he died — was a mystery.

Cartha DeLoach, assistant to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover at the time of King's murder, was skeptical about Wilson's story. "I doubt very seriously that it is true," he said.

James Earl Ray has been critically ill, sometimes in a coma, in a hospital prison ward in Nashville, Tenn. He is serving a 99-year sentence for the King assassination, to which he pleaded guilty in 1969 but soon recanted.

AP Photo

Former FBI agent Donald Wilson, right, and attorney William Pepper, who represents James Earl Ray, enter the Fulton County District Attorney's office in Atlanta yesterday.